Advocacy dossier

Labib Shayef

لبيب شائف

Detained (pretrial) **Yemen**

Labib Shayef is a Yemeni consultant who worked with local and international organisations, including on gender and peace programmes, and has been held by the Houthi authorities since his arrest in Sanaa on 6 June 2024. His case has been referred to the Specialised Criminal Court in Sanaa on espionage and aiding the enemy charges that carry the death penalty.

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The case at a glance

Labib Shayef is a Yemeni consultant who worked with local and international organisations, including on gender and peace programmes, and has been held by the Houthi authorities since his arrest in Sanaa on 6 June 2024. His case has been referred to the Specialised Criminal Court in Sanaa on espionage and aiding the enemy charges that carry the death penalty.

Status **Detained (pretrial)**	Arrested **6 Jun 2024**	Country **Yemen**
Charges Espionage (article 127 of the Penal Code) Aiding the enemy (article 128 of the Penal Code)		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Labib Shayef immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

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How the case unfolded

6 June 2024

Arrest

Arrested at his office in Sanaa

Houthi authorities arrested Labib Shayef, a consultant who worked with local and international organisations, including on gender and peace programmes, at his office in Sanaa. The arrest formed part of a campaign of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of UN staff and civil society workers that began on 31 May 2024; most of those arrested were not shown a warrant.

August 2025

Other act

Family allowed its only visit since his arrest

His family was able to visit him once, in August 2025. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported in October 2026 that this remained the only family visit since his arrest in June 2024.

August 2026

Interrogation

Transferred to the Specialised Criminal Prosecution and questioned about his work

From 18 August 2026 Houthi authorities began transferring detained UN and civil society staff to the Specialised Criminal Prosecution in Sanaa. He was among eight people sent for prosecution, and prosecutors questioned him about his work with local and international organisations. The exact date of his own transfer has not been published.

6 October 2026

Charge filed

Faces espionage and aiding the enemy charges carrying the death penalty

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported that all eight people sent for prosecution, including him, face charges of espionage and aiding the enemy under articles 127 and 128 of Yemen's Penal Code, both punishable by death. None of the accused is alleged to have committed an intentional killing.

6 October 2026

Referral to trial

Case referred to the Specialised Criminal Court in Sanaa

According to the same report, the Specialised Criminal Prosecution referred the cases to the Specialised Criminal Court in Sanaa, a court established in 1999. No hearing date has been published.

6 October 2026

Medical care denied

Health severely deteriorated without adequate care

He has diabetes and contracted hepatitis B in custody. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported that his health has severely deteriorated and that he has not received adequate medical care.

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The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Labib Shayef remains in Houthi detention in Sanaa, where he has been held since 6 June 2024. His case has been referred to the Specialised Criminal Court on espionage and aiding the enemy charges that carry the death penalty; no hearing date has been published.

Background and Work

Labib Shayef, aged 57 in October 2026, is a Yemeni consultant based in Sanaa. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, he worked with local and international organisations, including on programmes related to gender and peace. Little else about his professional history has been published, and his family has not spoken publicly in the sources reviewed.

The Arrest

Houthi authorities arrested him at his office in Sanaa on 6 June 2024. His arrest was part of a campaign that began on 31 May 2024 in which the Houthis detained dozens of UN staff and employees of Yemeni and international civil society organisations. Human Rights Watch reported that the authorities did not provide arrest warrants to most of those detained and that many were forcibly disappeared for months. Sami Kallabi, a UN worker, was arrested on the same day.

Detention Conditions and Health

He has diabetes and contracted hepatitis B in custody. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported in October 2026 that his health had severely deteriorated and that he had not received adequate medical care. His family has been able to visit him only once, in August 2025. Human Rights Watch reported more generally that detainees in this campaign have been denied adequate access to lawyers, family and medical care, and that some families report confessions obtained under torture or the threat of torture.

Legal Proceedings

On 18 August 2026 the Houthi authorities began transferring detainees from this campaign to the Specialised Criminal Prosecution in Sanaa. Human Rights Watch noted that Yemen's Criminal Procedures Law requires a detainee to be referred to the prosecution within 24 hours and a prosecutorial decision to follow within a further 24 hours, or release, and that more than two years of detention without referral or meaningful judicial review breached these safeguards.

By 6 October 2026 eight people had been sent for prosecution: two UN employees, a UN consultant and five people who had worked with civil society organisations. Labib Shayef is one of them. Prosecutors questioned him about his work with local and international organisations. The Specialised Criminal Prosecution referred the cases to the Specialised Criminal Court in Sanaa, established in 1999. All eight face charges of espionage and aiding the enemy under articles 127 and 128 of the Penal Code, both punishable by death. The other two people named by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are Sami Kallabi, 41, who has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy at a military hospital, and Dr Ali Al-Mudhwahi, a former UNICEF consultant and adviser

to the Houthi-run Ministry of Public Health and Population, whose wife said he had been held in solitary confinement, tortured and pressed to describe vaccines as tools of espionage.

International Response

In a joint release on 6 October 2026, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called on the Houthi authorities to halt these prosecutions and to release all those arbitrarily detained. They noted that none of the accused is alleged to have committed an intentional killing, the threshold of the "most serious crimes" for which international law tolerates the death penalty, and restated their opposition to the death penalty in all cases. They reported that at least 72 UN staff and dozens of humanitarian and civil society workers remained detained, while the World Food Programme announced on 5 October 2026 that one of its detained staff members had been released. Human Rights Watch had already warned on 25 August 2026 that the transfers to the prosecution were the latest step in the Houthis' campaign against UN and civil society staff.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/labib-shayef/

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